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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at six mentoring programs in Wisconsin for beginning teachers. Four of the programs (Beloit, Kenosha, Plattesville, and West Allis-West Milwaukee) are district programs in which teachers assume mentoring responsibilities in addition to teaching. In the Milwaukee School District program, veteran teachers serve as full-time mentors, and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater program is offered as a service to area school districts and mentors in the program to take on mentoring as an additional responsibility. The programs are described, including staffing, course content, selection process and criteria, participation requirements, incentives, training and support, and mentoring activities. Although the programs are different one from the other and present various advantages and disadvantages, each manifests a clear commitment to easing the transition of beginning teachers from prospective teacher to professional teacher. Contact information for each program is provided. (Contains 22 references.) (ND)

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A Comparison of Mentor Selection, Incentives, Training and Support, and Mentoring Activities in Six Wisconsin Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers

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A Comparison of Mentor Selection, Incentives, Training and Support, and Mentoring Activities in Six Wisconsin Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers

Programs for beginning teachers are a common feature of staff development programs throughout the United States (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; Furtwengler, 1995). This is likely to remain the case, especially in light of demographic information which predicts large numbers of new teachers entering the profession at the beginning of the 21st century and an increasing proportion of teachers reaching retirement age (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). Assisting beginning teachers makes sense, not only as an alternative to a "sink or swim" approach to teacher induction, but also as a means of promoting the professional growth of newcomers from the very start. Pairing experienced teachers as mentors with rookies is the most common form of systematic beginning teacher assistance. Formal mentoring programs for teachers have existed in the United States since the 1970s, and a useful body of theoretical and practical literature about mentoring and mentoring programs is readily available (e.g., Ashton, 1992; Bey & Holmes, 1992; DeBolt, 1992; Ganser, 1994b, 1995b, 1995c, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Gold, 1996; Gordon, 1991; Huling-Austin, 1990; Little, 1990; Sullivan, 1992).

Mentoring programs take many formats and serve several purposes. They are most commonly under the purview of local school districts, but they are also sponsored by state departments of education, consortia of schools, educational service agencies, and teachers' professional organizations. In many states, participation in a mentoring program is required for licensure. In some local districts, participation in a mentoring program is entirely voluntary, whereas in other districts it is a condition of employment.

Descriptions of Programs

The six Wisconsin programs described in this paper represent three different types. Four programs (Beloit, Kenosha, Platteville, and West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.) are district programs in which teachers assume mentoring responsibilities in addition to teaching. Milwaukee's district program is very atypical in that veteran teachers serve as full-time mentors. The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater program is offered as a service to area

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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school districts and mentors in this program take on mentoring as an additional responsibility. Selected features about these programs are displayed in Table 1. Additional information about these programs is available from the persons listed in the Appendix.

School District of Beloit Mentor/Mentee Program

The program is designed to help teachers succeed during their first teaching experience in the School District of Beloit. The intent of the program is to be instructive and supportive and is specifically designed to bridge the gap between the support given by the building principal and district staff and the experiences a new hire brings to the district. All teachers new to the district participate. They attend orientation activities and participate in special seminars. They also develop peer partnerships with assigned mentors. Large group meetings held throughout the year are designed to highlight district programs, promote curriculum initiatives, and explain policies and procedures. In the past three years, 81 beginning teachers have participated.

Kenosha Unified School District Together Project

The purpose is to enhance the district's beginning teacher induction program. The program provides mentors and proteges with district-specific orientation information, nine monthly informational seminars related to district initiatives and beginning teacher needs, and monthly small group support sessions to nurture and enhance the beginning teacher-mentor relationships. Any teacher with less than two years of teaching experience is placed in the beginning teacher program. The program is expanding to include a new category of support guides who will be matched with experienced educators new to the district or transferring into a new building or job area. In the past three years, 266 beginning teachers have participated.

Platteville Public Schools Beginning Teacher Assistance Program

Orientation, inservice, and peer partnerships are provided for teachers who are new to the district by peer mentors. Beginning teachers are defined as anyone new to the district. Beginning teachers attend orientation activities, participate in specifically designed seminars, and develop peer partnerships with assigned mentors for counseling support, classroom visitations, and special project collaboration. This systematic program of induction support introduces new educators to the staff, programs, and procedures that contribute to the district's unique professional climate. In the past three years, 16 beginning teachers have participated.

School District of West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al. First Year Teacher Mentoring Program

This is a planned program of assistance and support for beginning teachers by a team of professionals from the local schools, consisting of the first year teacher, a local school administrator, and a mentor teacher. There are four half day seminars throughout the school year for new teachers. First year teachers and teachers new to the district are required to participate in the program. In the past three years, 70 beginning teachers have participated.

Milwaukee Public Schools/Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association Mentor Teacher Program

This program is staffed by 18 teachers who serve as full time mentors and is currently offered to beginning teachers with no previous teaching experience. The program represents on-going collaboration between the leadership of the school district and teachers' association, and is partially funded with a state grant. A distinguishing characteristic of this program is a mentor board made up of seven teachers and six administrators which sets policy and selects mentors. In the past three years, 463 beginning teachers have participated.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Beginning Teacher Assistance Program

This is the longest continuously operating university-based mentoring program for beginning teachers in the United States (Ganser, 1992, 1994, 1995a). Beginning teachers and mentors are required to enroll in graduate courses. Nine meetings are held during the year (including two full days on campus). In the past three years, 24 beginning teachers have participated in this program.

Mentor Selection

All six programs presented in this study state commitment to goals promoting the professional well-being, professional development and growth, and enhancement of teacher performance and service to students. All mentor teachers selected must be experienced in the district, demonstrate a commitment to professional growth, and be recognized for professional or teaching expertise. These teachers are expected to make a commitment for the duration of the program.

Beloit

The mentor teacher must have five years experience. The building principal matches a

mentee with a mentor who has the necessary background and appropriate grade level to assist the beginning teacher.

Kenosha

Selection is primarily done by principal discretion. Each spring a pool of volunteers is developed and matches are made between mentor and mentee by the building principal, the mentor coordinator, and the beginning teacher.

Platteville

Mentors must be experienced teachers in the district who desire to take on the role and responsibilities of a mentor. They must be located in close proximity to the new teacher and have a teaching assignment similar to the new teacher's grade level or curricular area. Mentors are selected and assigned by a committee composed of the district administrator, the director of instruction, and the building principal. Recently teachers have become involved in the selection process.

West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.

Interested teachers volunteer to participate in the mentor program. Principals review the volunteer list for a good match with a beginning teacher. Mentor names are submitted to the district coordinator for training. Mentors are selected on the basis of qualifications, needs of the beginning teacher, and a perceived match of personalities.

Milwaukee

The first 18 mentor teachers were selected in 1991 from over 80 applicants. The negotiated contract language spells out the requirements for being a mentor teacher. The mentor board, co-chaired by the director of curriculum and a teacher, oversees the application and selection process. Prospective mentors are interviewed by the mentor board. Applicants

must have completed five years as a teacher in the district and must have three letters of recommendation, including two from teachers. Mentors are selected according to need and paired with beginning teachers at the same level or specialization. Mentors may or may not have direct teaching experience in the beginning teachers' assigned grade level or content area. Teachers may serve as a mentor for up to three years.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Individual school districts and typically principals control mentor selection, occasionally after seeking the advice of the program director. In some cases, the selection process is specified in detail by the teachers' contract.

Mentor Incentives

All six programs offer both informal and formal incentives for mentors. Opportunities for professional and personal growth are usually cited, especially the personal satisfaction in helping to meet the needs of beginning teachers. Formal incentives for mentors include cash stipends, released time for mentoring activities, participation in recognition meetings, attendance at seminars and conferences, opportunities to earn college or inservice credits, and participation in the district's hiring process.

Beloit

Mentor teachers have the opportunity for professional growth through participation in seminars organized for beginning teachers. Mentors also receive a stipend, as specified in the teachers' contract. In 1994-95 the stipend was $624.

Kenosha

Currently mentors can earn two inservice credits applicable to the incremental pay scale by participating in mentor training sessions and attending three beginning teacher seminars. A

local state university has also agreed to waive a required course for cooperating teachers for mentors who have completed the mentor training. There was also a recognition gathering and a certificate presented to mentors in 1995.

Platteville

Formal incentives include a $300 stipend and six periods of released time (generally half days) to work with beginning teachers. Mentors often participate in search and screen procedures that include describing qualities desired in the new teacher, writing interview questions, and reviewing credentials.

West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.

Both beginning teachers and mentors are paid for attending four three-hour meetings at an hourly rate of $18.06 for 1995-96, equal to the district's rate of payment for curriculum planning projects. The district also recognizes mentors and beginning teachers for their participation through a certificate signed by the program coordinator and the superintendent of schools.

Milwaukee

Although mentors are not provided with a separate stipend, they qualify for a different salary schedule that results in increased earnings. The district extends the contract year for mentors by approximately 45 minutes per day and nine days per year.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Currently, mentors receive a $160 stipend and are recognized for their professional contributions through a certificate signed by the program director and the dean of the College of Education. Starting in 1996-97, the stipend will be replaced with vouchers that can be used for subscriptions to professional journals, access to the Internet, and eligibility for small grants

to support of action-research and other professional development projects. Each beginning teacher/mentor team qualifies for a $150 grant for professional development activities. Graduate credits earned by mentors and beginning teachers can be used for license renewal and as electives in many graduate programs.

Mentor Training and Support

Mentors are usually provided with some training by a district employee. For the most part, the training is mandatory, relatively short in duration, offered at the beginning of the school year, and not linked to credit. Common topics covered during training include mentor roles and responsibilities, beginning teacher needs, and observation and conferencing skills. In general, any support for mentors beyond initial training is informal and unstructured. Finally, mentors generally have no formal contact with mentors in school districts other than their own.

Beloit

Teachers are selected to be mentors because of excellence in teaching and active participation in site-based decision-making. They have generally had training in working with student teachers. Teachers are not provided with any training specifically related to mentoring roles and responsibilities.

Kenosha

Until 1995-96, mentor training was not provided. Currently, mentors who elect to receive two inservice credits to be applied to the incremental pay scales are required to participate in two four-hour training sessions during the week prior to the opening of school and repeated in early October. Training is provided by the mentor coordinator who is a full time reading specialist. Topics included are teacher development, reflective practice, beginning teacher needs, and mentor needs and responsibilities. Additional support for

mentors includes a personal call from the mentor coordinator during the fall semester.

Platteville

The director of instruction meets with the mentor teachers individually to review their role and provide support. They are offered staff development opportunities to attend meetings or conferences and a follow-up meeting is held with mentor teachers near the end of the first semester. In terms of on-going support, mentors have open access to building principals, other mentors, and the director of instruction.

West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.

Mentor training consists one two-hour training session held after school during the first week in September. It is conducted by the coordinator of staff development. Topics covered include teacher career stages, mentor roles, conference cycle skills, beginning teacher needs and common concerns, and research on mentoring.

Milwaukee

The first group of 18 mentors selected in 1991 were given five half days of training conducted by the mentor board co-chairpersons and three university consultants. Training included team building activities, mentor definitions, discussion of mentoring styles, observation and conferencing skills, and knowledge of district resources. Experienced mentors now provide training for new mentors at the end and again at the beginning of the school year.

In terms of on-going support, the mentors assemble weekly for a half day meeting. The mentor board also provides team building activities and opportunities, and occasionally brings in district resource people (e.g., bilingual specialists) based on needs identified by the mentors. Mentors are assigned a member of the mentor board as a resource and they share office space in the district's professional development facility, secretarial support, and a voice

mail system.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Mentors must enroll in a graduate course which meets five times during the fall semester and is taught by the program director. Topics include teacher development, beginning teacher needs, teacher induction, mentor roles and stages of mentoring, conferencing skills, systematic observation of teaching, problem-solving strategies, and peer coaching. A second optional course is available during the spring semester and includes as topics adult development and learning, organization of mentoring programs, benefits of mentoring, obstacles to mentoring, and the place of mentoring in school organizations.

Time is provided during class meetings and some monthly meetings for mentors to share their experiences and to seek the advice of their colleagues. A program consultant (currently a kindergarten teacher who only teaches half days) meets with each beginning teacher/mentor team at their school once each semester. Occasionally, the program director solicits the assistance of university faculty at the request of the beginning teacher/mentor team or the program consultant.

Mentoring Activities

All programs provide written descriptions of suggested or required mentoring activities. In some programs, mentors are encouraged or obligated to attend district orientation meetings for beginning teachers. The most common mentoring activity is periodic meetings throughout the year, generally after the school day. For the most part, the target audience for these meetings is beginning teachers but mentors are encouraged and sometimes required to attend. Common topics include classroom management, time management, parent-teacher communication and conferences, motivation, and teaching styles.

Regular meetings between beginning teachers and their mentors are encouraged, often weekly during the fall semester but sometimes less frequently during the spring semester. In many cases, school districts provide the beginning teachers and/or mentors with substitute teacher support for released time used for planning and especially for classroom visitations. Only rarely are mentors and beginning teachers, separately or as a team, required to produce any written documents related to mentoring. Both implicitly and explicitly, mentoring is clearly disassociated from formal, summative evaluation.

Beloit

Six or seven support seminars are held throughout the year in the early evening or during on-class time. They are centered around specific needs or concerns of beginning teachers. The seminars combine a presentation of material that bears directly upon the classroom needs of beginning teachers and an open discussion between beginning teachers, or between mentors and beginning teachers. Typical topics include long/short range goals, lesson plans, parent conferences, and teaching strategies such as Talents Unlimited, GESA, TESA, and World of Difference. Attendance at these meetings is required for beginning teachers but optional for mentors. Mentors are required to attend two half days of beginning teacher orientation at the start of the school year. Both mentors and mentees have two half days of released time for each team. Additional released time may be provided when substitute time is available in the building.

Kenosha

Nine beginning teacher seminars are held each year, but only mentors who elect to earn two inservice credit are required to attend at least three of the nine seminars. Beyond this, attendance at seminars is optional for mentors but required for beginning teachers. Seminars

are related to district initiatives and beginning teacher needs, and small group support sessions aim to nurture and enhance the beginning teacher-mentor relationship. Mentors are required to produce an action plan for their partnership with their protege and to submit a reflection paper based on the results of the action plan at the end of the year. The mentor coordinator write a quarterly newsletter for the mentors and the beginning teacher coordinator (a full time teacher) writes the newsletter for the beginning teachers.

Platteville

Mentors are required to attend a new teacher luncheon. Mentors are also expected to assist beginning teachers with their initial orientation and to provide continuing orientation as needed during the school year. Each beginning teacher/mentor team is provided with six released time "peer partnership visitations" (each approximately half day) during the school year. Mentors are not able to attend five beginning teacher induction seminars which are scheduled during the day in the fall semester. The seminars focus on such topics as effective teacher skills, district services for handicapped and at-risk students, motivation theory, lesson design, and reinforcement theory.

West Allis-West Milwaukee

In this program, the role of the mentor teacher is to provide daily support, advice, and counsel to the first year teacher as an experienced member of the teaching profession. To this end, mentors are required to hold a weekly conference with the first year teacher to discuss concern, progress, and on-going professional development, in addition to informal daily meetings. The first year teacher is required to observe the mentor once or twice followed by a conference and the mentor is required to observe the beginning teacher once or twice followed by a conference. Mentors attend four mentoring seminars held from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. for

beginning teachers. The topics for these seminars in 1995-96 are classroom management, parent conferencing, special student needs, and teaching strategies.

Milwaukee

Mentoring activities are determined solely by the mentor teachers. There are no regularly scheduled meetings or seminars for beginning teachers as part of this program, but they can participate in regular staff development activities. Depending on the number of beginning teachers assigned to a mentor (up to ten), the number of schools in which the beginning teachers work (sometimes more than five), and the geographical distribution of the schools, mentors usually visit beginning teachers in their schools once or twice a week, depending on need. These visits, typically scheduled in advance, can include conferences, sharing resources, classroom observations, and demonstration teaching. Occasionally, mentors conduct inservice workshops for groups of beginning teachers and some mentors have also made presentations about the program at state and national meetings.

University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Beginning teachers and mentors are expected to attend nine monthly meetings held on campus. The September and April meetings are day long and require school districts to provide substitute teachers. The September meeting includes opportunities for participants to discuss expectations, roles, and responsibilities. From October through March meetings are held from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. and typically focus on a topic of interest to beginning teachers and mentors. Sometimes former mentors are invited to be presenters. There are also two meetings each semester for the beginning teachers only. Mentors and beginning teachers are expected to visit each other's class at least once a semester and to hold regularly scheduled meetings, weekly during the fall semester and at least twice a month during the spring

semester. As part of their graduate course, beginning teachers must complete a professional development journal consisting of eight to ten topics each semester, some which call for the participation of their mentor.

Discussion

Each of the six Wisconsin mentoring programs described in this paper is a separate entity, yet they all share many common features. Each extends over one year. Mentor selection and training generally takes place after the need has been determined rather than before. Training tends to be provided early in the year, intense, limited in duration, and seldom without any structured follow up.

Among the programs, some notable differences emerge. For example, there are differences in determining what kind of "new" teacher participates in the program, and whether or not participation is required. Also, various processes are in place for selecting mentors, ranging from seeking volunteers to following a detailed process in Milwaukee that includes written application, reference letters, and an interview before a group of mentor board members. Most programs are directed by school district supervisors or administrators. Only the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater program brings together teachers from different districts and is linked to college credit.

Each of these mentoring programs is viable and likely to remain so. Although revealing sometimes striking differences and various advantages and disadvantages, they all manifest a clear commitment to easing the transition of beginning teachers from prospective teacher to professional teacher. This commitment is all the more noteworthy because there are no licensing requirements in Wisconsin call for beginning teacher programs or mentoring, unlike many other states. This may change as reform efforts in Wisconsin exploring

differentiated teacher licenses and the career-long professional development of teachers move forward (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1995), but it is very probable that those efforts will complement and support Wisconsin mentoring programs already in operation.

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Appendix

Additional information about the mentoring programs described in this paper can be obtained from the following persons:

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Table 1

Selected facts about six Wisconsin mentoring programs

Entity	1993-96 average annual enrollment	Beginning teachers served in program				
		1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1993-1996 total	1993-1996 average
Beloit	7,050	33	20	28	81	27
Kenosha	18,000	75	100	91	266	89
Milwaukee	102,300	176	167	120	463	154
Platteville	1,850	4	7	5	16	5
West Allis-West Milwaukee, et al.	9,200	12	28	28	70	23
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater	n/a	5	8	12	25	8